



NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

# STRATEGIC FORUM

INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES

20011003 022

After the Cold War

## South Asian Security

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Note

Conclusions

Recommendations

### The U.S. Approach to the Indian Sub-Continent

Asymmetries dominate South Asia, explaining much of the region's tension, and complicating the U.S. approach to its major powers, India and Pakistan. Disparities in geographic size, population, military capability, and economic markets leave the Pakistanis feeling inferior to India and reinforce India's view of itself as an emerging major power.

For much of the last five decades, South Asia was of episodic strategic interest to the United States. The region's strategic value was measured almost solely in terms of the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union and varied with the mercurial cycles of U.S.-Soviet geopolitical competition. Even at the height of the region's relevance for U.S. global policy, in the 1950s and again in the 1980s, the link between Washington and South Asia was never comfortable.

The region's two key powers, India and Pakistan, were on opposite sides of the Cold War struggle. In the 1970s and 1980s, India was among the most important of the Soviet Union's Third World allies, while Pakistan's security orientation was consistently pro-Western. This presented an awkward problem for the United States. The world's largest democracy and non-sectarian nation (therefore a seemingly natural ally), India, led the "non-aligned" movement and became alienated from the United States, while Pakistan, a nation with little natural political affinity with America, saw its strategic connection improve even as its government became increasingly autocratic and Islamic under General Zia ul Haq.

The importance of Afghanistan as a factor in Pakistan's strategic prominence for U.S. policy makers throughout the 1980s cannot be overstated. The Soviet invasion in 1979 marked a turning point in U.S. strategic policy for Southwest Asia, and the Persian Gulf. Not since the days of John Foster Dulles' "Northern Tier" strategy was Pakistan so prominent as a U.S. regional surrogate with a disproportionately large share of U.S. security assistance. During this critical period, Islamabad's leaders were left with the impression that Pakistan's covert nuclear weapons program would not be a serious impediment to close relations with the United States. All of this reassured them vis-a-vis India. With the collapse of the Soviet position in Afghanistan and Moscow's eventual withdrawal, Pakistan's preferential

treatment ended.

Legislative prohibitions on U.S. assistance (brought about through the Pressler amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act) triggered by U.S. concerns over Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, essentially halted economic and military aid after 1990. Pakistan regarded this as a betrayal.

Pakistan's perception that the U.S. had abandoned it was particularly powerful in light of Afghanistan. Pakistan's willingness to allow its territory to be used as a conduit for U.S. weapons to the Mujahidin not only created the perception of a lasting closeness with the United States, it also exacted large long-term social, economic, and political costs, including refugee waves, Islamic extremism, terrorism and narcotics production on a large scale. U.S. support for Pakistan has ceased as these problems have become worse, compounding the country's ability to cope with them.

## **The New Context of South Asian Security**

South Asia is the only region where three nuclear competing powers share frontiers and a recent history of four wars. Their rivalries have fueled conventional and unconventional arms races, unrestrained by arms control regimes. Moreover, the USSR, China, and the United States have involved India and Pakistan in their own rivalries, as well as having been brought into the Indo-Pakistani disputes. Moscow was New Delhi's constant patron; Beijing assisted Islamabad and the U.S. position fluctuated. Finally, the uncertainties of the post-Cold War world, increasing domestic discontent, and politically weak governments exacerbate a tendency of India and Pakistan to incite separatist movements on each other's territory—Indian meddling in Sindh and Pakistani involvement in Punjab and in Kashmir.

India's loss of its superpower benefactor, the Soviet Union, and the demise of the "non-aligned" movement has left it without its foreign policy anchors, which provided a degree of independence from the United States. India has thus found itself more dependent on the goodwill of the United States, with whom it had never enjoyed a close relationship. In addition, New Delhi recognizes that India's long-term power is dependent in large part upon economic growth and a closer relationship with the United States, and with Western economic institutions and investors.

Pakistan had hoped that with the demise of the Soviet Union, the anticipated weakening of India regionally, and its close ties with China and Iran that it could pay less attention to India as a threat. A number of factors combined to erase this hope:

- (1) a building U.S.-Indian rapprochement;
- (2) tentative signs of reduced hostility between India and China;
- (3) increased attention by New Delhi to improving indigenous military programs and a continuing arms relationship with Russia;
- (4) U.S. imposition of the Pressler aid cutoff;
- (5) Chinese pledges to support the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which portended a diminution in Chinese efforts to assist Pakistan in its efforts to modernize its military capabilities (particularly ballistic missiles) and thus hedge against the effects of the Pressler restrictions on U.S. assistance;
- (6) a refusal by Washington to intervene diplomatically in the Kashmir conflict, and;
- (7) India's new status with other states (e.g., Iran) as a key growing economic power.

## **The Nuclear Option and Regional Deterrence**

Pakistan and India must be regarded as de facto nuclear powers; their programs have progressed to the point where each possesses the critical components of atomic weapons, and could assemble and deliver them in short order.

The rationales for Indian and Pakistani acquisition of nuclear weapons (or other mass destruction arms) are distinct although not dissimilar. India's initial venture into nuclear arms attempted to convey regional and global prestige and influence, but was more immediately an answer to India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict and the subsequent 1964 Chinese nuclear test. Pakistan's nuclear weapons effort is a political-military instrument directed principally against India, whose larger conventional force can never hope to be matched by Pakistan. The Pakistani nuclear effort has reportedly been aided by China, with nuclear weapons design information, materials, and reactors. Islamabad's interest in a nuclear capability was initially sparked by the 1971 war with India and over time became a symbol of prestige and influence, like its rival India. Most Pakistani strategists and military leaders regard the nuclear choice as a prudent strategic bargain. As Pakistan's former Army Chief of Staff, General Mirza Aslam Beg, noted, a nuclear deterrent for Pakistan represents "the cheapest option for peace," balancing India's other advantages. Apart from the consuming bilateral rivalry, both Indians and Pakistanis see nuclear weapons as an instrument of independence from the United States and other outside powers.

Neither India nor Pakistan regards the current international nonproliferation regime (the NPT and the IAEA system of safeguards) as relevant or helpful to its security problems. India has always regarded the NPT as the centerpiece of a conscious U.S. policy of denying lesser nations access to the fruits of economic and industrial development, to which the world's largest democracy should be entitled. In addition, India prefers a global arms control approach which places India on the same strategic level as the five acknowledged nuclear powers, and which would consequently discount Pakistan's presumption to equal status. Pakistan is not enthusiastic about the NPT, although its leaders have offered conditions under which it would sign the Treaty. Like India, Pakistan also accuses the United States of discrimination in application of arms control principles.

Pakistan regards the Pressler amendment as discriminatory as it holds Pakistan to a higher nonproliferation standard than Israel or India. Islamabad also considers the MTCR as discriminatory, because it penalizes nations dependent upon imported technology and weapons (Pakistan) and effectively grants those with indigenous weapons development programs (India), a relative advantage. This "double standard" serves to reinforce in the minds of many Pakistanis the suspicion that Pakistan's status as a friend of the U.S. has disappeared.

India and Pakistan have both come to recognize the dangerous escalatory potential of their nuclear competition. For the moment, both governments seem to support a doctrine of "non-weaponized deterrence" whereby neither has moved toward further testing, final assembly, or deployment of nuclear weapons. The key security question is whether this condition can be sustained.

## **An Emerging Ballistic Missile Race**

Among the gravest security threats on the Indian subcontinent are the programs, by both India and Pakistan, to develop surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, and in the case of Pakistan, the probable import of Chinese missiles as well. These missiles could carry either conventional or unconventional (nuclear, biological, chemical) weapons. Ballistic missiles are the weapon of choice for many developing nations. Their technical characteristics--speed to target, relative invulnerability to defenses, mobility, increasing accuracy, adaptability for carrying WMD warheads--contribute to their inherently destabilizing nature in

regional rivalries, where the relatively short distances between borders allow even tactical-range systems to have a significant impact upon regional balances.

India has developed both short-range (Prithvi; 150-250 kms) and medium-range (Agni; 1500-2500 kms) missiles, although progress with the latter lags behind the former. Once operational, the Agni would have sufficient range to reach targets throughout Pakistan, into parts of China, the Arabian peninsula and the Persian Gulf, and the southern portions of the former Soviet Union. The Agni could be deployed in the south, beyond the range of Pakistan's current aircraft and missiles. Either missile could reach the population and industrial centers along Pakistan's eastern border with India. Prithvi has reached the operational stage where some missiles could be deployed in positions near the Pakistani border, once the political decision is taken. This has created great anxiety in Pakistan since it could circumvent Pakistan's air defenses. Most troubling, is the attraction of using ballistic missiles to deliver *unconventional* payloads (nuclear, biological, chemical) due to their relative inaccuracy.

Pakistan's short-range missile, the HATF, has been developed in three variants (tested in two), with ranges of from 80-600 kms. However, it is less accurate and reliable than the Prithvi. The short range limits the missile's reach to portions of Northern India. Islamabad has also apparently purchased, but not deployed, Chinese M-11's, whose range is estimated at 300 kms, the limit of the MTCR. Pakistan's public position is that the missiles have not yet been delivered, although that is a subject of intense debate in the U.S. intelligence community.

## Kashmir

The roots of the Kashmir dispute go back to the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. A Hindu Maharajah accepted Indian military assistance and union with India to quell a Pakistani effort to incorporate the Moslem-majority princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The result was Indian control of roughly two-thirds of Kashmir, with Pakistani jurisdiction over the remaining third (Azad Kashmir), separated by a UN-negotiated Line of Control. After two more wars and the signing of the 1972 Simla agreement between India and Pakistan (mandating a bilateral settlement to resolve the Kashmir issue), there has been relatively no progress toward resolution. Today, this dispute is the most critical Indo-Pakistani security concern, and the most likely flash point in the region. Neither India nor Pakistan is satisfied with the status quo and further eruptions are likely.

Since 1989 a continuing insurrection in Kashmir has evolved into a simmering crisis, fueled by assistance from Pakistan to a Kashmiri insurgency (aided by Afghan Islamic groups through what Indians label as a terror campaign) and by Indian human rights abuses and deployment of several hundred thousand Indian troops. Neither government is enthusiastic about an independent Kashmir and neither is very anxious for a plebiscite since there is considerable uncertainty as to the result.

India insists that the Kashmir issue must be settled through bilateral discussions with Pakistan, while Pakistan encourages international involvement. Washington is not regarded by either side as a honest broker on this very complex issue and is poorly positioned to mediate.

## INTERNET DOCUMENT INFORMATION FORM

**A . Report Title:** South Asian Security

**B. DATE Report Downloaded From the Internet:** 10/01/01

**C. Report's Point of Contact: (Name, Organization, Address, Office  
Symbol, & Ph #):** National Defense University Press  
Institute for National Strategic Studies  
Washington, DC 20001

**D. Currently Applicable Classification Level:** Unclassified

**E. Distribution Statement A:** Approved for Public Release

**F. The foregoing information was compiled and provided by:**  
**DTIC-OCA, Initials:** \_\_VM\_\_ **Preparation Date** 10/01/01

The foregoing information should exactly correspond to the Title, Report Number, and the Date on the accompanying report document. If there are mismatches, or other questions, contact the above OCA Representative for resolution.